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UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000846

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM SOCI PREL KIRF PGOV VM

SUBJECT: TENSIONS CONTINUE BETWEEN HOA HAO AND MEKONG DELTA
AUTHORITIES

REF: A) HANOI 2073 B) HCMC 825 C) HCMC 600 D) HCMC 433

1. (SBU) Summary: Tensions between Hoa Hao activists and authorities in An Giang and Dong Thap provinces remain high a week after two activists self-immolated in response to police raids on their homes. Police remain camped outside the homes of select Hoa Hao leaders, and as many as 25 more followers have threatened self-immolation. We continue to urge all parties to exercise restraint. End Summary.

2. (SBU) A week following the self-immolation of two Hoa Hao activists and the arrest of eight others, tension continues to mount between Hoa Hao and authorities in An Giang and nearby provinces. According to Hoa Hao dissident leader Le Quang Liem, more than 25 of his followers in An Giang, Vinh Long and Dong Thap have publicly proclaimed they will self-immolate if authorities do not release those detained in the raids of August 5. Truong Van Duc, another dissident leader, told us he remains holed up in his home in An Giang, with "50 or 60" police and other officials "on guard" outside. Duc continued to threaten self-immolation if authorities attempted to enter his house. Neither Liem nor Duc had any information about the welfare or whereabouts of the activist who attempted self-immolation August 5.

3. (SBU) Acting PolOff spoke to Liem August 12 and once again urged restraint, continuing to emphasize that the USG does not regard self-immolation as a constructive form of protest. Liem said he had been urging restraint to his followers and claimed there would have been more acts of self-immolation had he not spoken out against it. He asked for U.S. intervention and claimed that the problems between Hoa Hao and authorities were "purely religious" (i.e., not political). Acting CG telephoned Le Hung Quoc, First Vice Director, HCMC External Relations Office (ERO), emphasizing the need for restraint on the part of local authorities in dealing with Hoa Hao adherents, and noting that we had also told Hoa Hao members that the USG does not condone violent acts like self-immolation. Quoc invited Acting CG to meet him August 15 and said he would provide information about the situation.

4. (SBU) Comment: In the August 15 meeting, ERO will likely present details and arguments similar to the information sheet and comments provided by MFA to Pol/C in Hanoi on August 12 (Ref A). The apparent unwillingness or inability of either side to back down increases the danger of further violence, including self-immolations. Given the political coloration of his previous activities and his disdain for the Communists (reftels), Liem's claim that this is a "purely religious" matter seems oversimplified. End Comment.

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